

Strategies that Succeed

Stories from the SAGE Project

2. Guinea's Local Alliances Energize Communities

Over 400 people turned out in January 2002 for the inauguration of a junior secondary school in the town of Lelouma, located in a province of rural Guinea. The Lelouma Local Alliance, a network of community leaders committed to improving education for girls and boys, raised an impressive sum of money to build the new school. Close to 25 million Guinean Francs (USD \$12,500), was raised over 2-3 years for the construction of the school.

To confront the educational gender gap, SAGE Guinea has supported the development of Local Alliances to promote girls' education. The results demonstrate the importance of creating local-level institutions to increase support for girls' schooling.

Local donations accounted for more than a third of the total contributions (9 million GNF). The Prefet of Lelouma, education officials, school directors, religious leaders, heads of women's associations and the Deputy Director of USAID Guinea were in attendance at the ceremony. In Guinea, the

Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) project is working with local alliances such as Lelouma's Local Alliance to affect change at the community level.

Implemented by the Academy for Educational Development, SAGE has been working in five countries (Guinea, Mali, Ghana, El Salvador, and the Democratic Republic of Congo) to develop multisectoral partnerships in support of girls' education. Since 1999, SAGE Guinea has been building partnerships at the national and community levels; training leaders (religious and media) in girls' education; and mobilizing organizations, NGOs, PVOs, and CBOs, in support of girls' access,



Creating a local alliance through a mobilization campaign.

retention and completion of school.

SAGE Guinea has faced important challenges in girls' education. Even though the gender gap is decreasing, there are still inequities in girls' access, retention, and completion of school. To confront these challenges, SAGE Guinea has supported the development of a number of national level groups, such as the National Alliance, the National Media Task Force, and the National Fund for Girls' Education (FONSEF). On the local level, SAGE Guinea has supported the development and achievement of Local Alliances to promote girls' education. The results from the Local Alliances demonstrate the importance of creating local level institutions to support girls' education efforts.



A member of the National Media Task Force disperses books to a local alliance during Girls' Education Day celebrations.

History and Overview of the Local Alliances

Nineteen local alliances were set up across Guinea between 1997 and 1999. Establishment of the local alliances was a result of community consultations which addressed barriers to girls' education. These barriers included poverty, domestic chores, early pregnancy, early marriage, lack of schools, distance from schools, lack of teachers, and community isolation (Williams 2001). As Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) had proven ineffective in promoting gender equity in schools, it was felt that a new organization, representing all stakeholders in the community, was needed to serve as a catalyst. In order to meet this need, local alliances were established to include up to 60 members, drawing from com-

munity leaders, religious leaders, women's associations, the PTA, and business entrepreneurs as well as representatives of

school administration and local government.

In May of 1999, SAGE Guinea undertook two workshops in action planning to train six pilot local alliances. The workshop consisted of six sessions on different aspects of action planning (Morin 1999a):

- Why an Action Plan - Setting the Context
- Identifying Priorities, Objectives and Results within a Vision
- Establishing an Action Plan Time Line Calendar
- Identifying and Programming Resources-Human, Material, Natural and Financial
- Working up an Action Plan Budget
- Sharing the Action Plan with the Community

SAGE Guinea met with the Local Alliances in September of 1999, a few months after the initial training had passed. This was an important opportunity to share lessons learned from the beginning of implementation of the action plans. All of the local alliances had planned activities for Girls' Education Day (June 21) and reported that their celebrations were very successful and that entire communities

turned out in support of the activity (Morin 1999b). In the following years, the SAGE Guinea staff has continued meeting annually with the Local Alliances to discuss progress on their action plans. The commitment of individual Local Alliance leaders has been shown in their willingness to travel the distance to Conakry to meet with the SAGE Guinea Country Coordinator and present periodic progress reports.

Results

Through their interventions, the local alliances in the six pilot zones, with support from SAGE, have achieved measurable improvements in girls' education indicators between 1998 and 2002. The following achievements from four of the Local Alliances are notable:

- The local alliance of Kaback focussed on increasing the access of girls to schools, and reported a huge increase in a period of three years. In 1988 the number of enrolled girls in the primary schools of Kaback was 47 girls, in 2001 it became 527. The percentage of girls who dropped out of school decreased from 8% in 1999 down to 0% in



A director of a pedagogical institute—and a role model for girls—visits a classroom in Conakry.

2001. Between 1998 and 2001 the number of primary schools grew from four to ten, built with community participation and partner support. In addition, 12 contractual schoolteachers out of 20 primary schoolteachers were recruited and paid by community members.

- The local alliance of Lelouma recognized that the issue for them was not so much the access of girls to school but rather their high drop out from school. In 1998, the total number of girls in the six primary grades was 746 versus 869 boys, even though the numbers of boys and girls enrolled at grade one were nearly equal. In 2001, this gap had narrowed and the

total number of girls became 878 and the number of boys 938. In addition, the Lelouma Alliance negotiated during this same period with two school stores and convinced them to sell supplies at a reduced rate. Also, The Local Alliance mobilized the community to build a three-class junior secondary school.

- In 1998, the local alliance of Dougountouny reported a severe gender gap between girls and boys enrollments. In 1998, there were 70 girls enrolled in first grade versus 164 boys. The total enrollment showed that only one-third of those enrolled in primary school were girls (193 girls versus 576 boys). In

2002, due to the efforts of the local alliance, the gender gap in first grade enrollments had decreased to zero. There were 238 girls enrolled in first grade versus 234 boys. A gender gap remains, though, in total enrollment in primary school where only 549 out of 1494 students are girls. In addition to activities promoting increased girls' enrollments and retention, the local alliance completed building a new school building, with school furniture (tables, benches, and shelves).

- In 1998, the local alliance of Brouwal Sounki reported that there were 33 girls enrolled in first grade versus 73 boys. In

the year 2002, enrollments for both girls and boys in first grade had increased, with 200 girls enrolled and 241 boys enrolled. The gender gap, although decreasing, remains in overall school enrollments. In 1998, 156 girls were enrolled in primary school versus 736 boys. In 2002, there were 609 girls enrolled versus 1167 boys.

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Contributors: Dr. Aly Badara Doukouré, Nesbert Camara, Martin Dramou, and Nora Kruk

Written by Debra Schumann

Edited by Giselle Mitton

For further information, contact May Rihani or Giselle Mitton
Academy for Educational Development
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20009
www.aed.org



Academy for Educational Development

